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GRECIAN SCULPTURE.

It is a profitable and pleasant task to recall old scenes, and picture to ourselves nations, customs, and laws, as they existed centuries ago. The ruins of cities, the statues of heroes, and the empty temples, speak of ages long past, of honors forgotten, and of sacred rites neglected. The eye is dazzled by these relics of beauty, and fain would read the untold histories of their birth and decay. The imagination brings before us the feelings and hopes of ancient generations, and views the busy throng as they wend their way hither and thither. The ear eagerly listens to catch some sound to break the awful stillness, but perpetual silence reigns, and nothing disturbs the dismal scene save the wind whispering a requiem among the crumbling monuments of former glory, or the footfall of some intruding traveller. Time, in its onward course, has left an impress upon all things, and slowly but surely robs the graceful fabric of its symmetry and elegance. Nation is succeeded by nation. Warrior is followed by warrior. Power is accompanied by weakness; and nothing is known of these varied changes except from the confused narrations of ignorant writers or the still more uncertain stories of tradition.

To a student of Art, few countries possess more interest than Greece. The Epics of Homer are as familiar to us as they were to those who first caught the strains of the Grecian bard and listened with enchanted ears to the stories of gods and heroes. His characters are not puerile and effeminate, but are endowed with the noblest attributes and clothed with dignity and majesty. He endeavors to redeem mankind from vice, and points them to his creations as being fitted for their approval and imitation. He, therefore, is prominent among his contemporaries as the exponent of greatness and nobility. To unite humanity with divinity was this poet's true mission. As each nation has stamped its conceptions and investigations upon its works of Art, and engraven them on monumental piles, we are enabled to infer the mental constitution and intellectual growth of the people. Compared with every other nation, Greece stands preëminent in every department of literature and the arts. Her language is adapted to the softest and sweetest breathings of the muse, to the most impassioned oratory, and to the martial notes of the warrior. The ideality of Homer's poesy, the grace and beauty of his dictation, the sublimity of his characters, and the religious genius of his subjects could not but inspire feelings of courage, love of country, and a spirit of devotion in the souls of the Greeks, and incite them to strive for the crowns which graced the brows of Olympian divinities.

From Grecian sculpture, it is evident, that heroes and men exalted among the gods were embraced in their mythology. They worshipped and adored not the statue, but the idea, and in their religious enthusiasm endeavored to give a visible representation to their conception, and instead of possessing a perfectly spiritual and refined religion, they made the individuality of man an object of worship. The

sculptor's aim was not to produce a figure, which should be a mere imitation of the human form, nor did the artist lavish his efforts upon a subject, which should appear as an anatomical wonder, and exhibit the graceful contour and faultless proportions. These were only accessories. His real and only motive was to render a model, in which should be embodied some isolated, prominent traits of the soul, capable of adoration and worship. This only was deemed worthy of the artist's toil. All other attempts were deemed sacrilegious.

This spirit animated Phidias to construct the Temple of Minerva, the gem of classic Art; and through the inspiring and potent influence of Homer's verses was he led to fashion a work, whose beauty and perfection historians have recorded with graphic pen, and of whose grace the bards have sung in sweetest, loftiest measures. Well might the Greeks revere the name of Phidias, and, as they stood spell-bound before the statue of Zeus Olympius, invoke blessings upon him who could rise above persecution and ingratitude, to perform still greater deeds for posterity. No name but that of Phidias was ever worthy to be inscribed upon the statue of Jupiter. He was the first of sculptors to catch inspiration and to idealize his productions, and thus was formed anew the whole Grecian mind. Sculpture was no longer a mechanical effort purely, but a powerful medium of conveying impressive emotions to the soul. The minds of the mass were, to a large extent, imbued with the sentiments of Phidias, and such was his power that the religious element seems to have had an unwonted impulse, since he so nearly approached divinity in his compositions.

From the remains of Egyptian sculpture we are enabled to detect a striking similarity to Grecian statuary. The winged lions, the fanciful bas-reliefs, and the colossal sphinxes and obelisks, are no imitative productions. Such models were never encountered in Nature. These were rather the symbols of some vague and undefined principles. Fettered by the priests, there was little progress, since it was never permitted to behold a model free from drapery. Grace and beauty could not then be evinced, but a solemn grandeur and awe rests upon each Egyptian divinity. The Egyptian genius was but the fitful, and glimmering light which preceded the glorious brightness of Grecian Art. The same spirit of devotion animated the Egyptians to carve images of their gods as incited the Greeks to construct temples. The former adored brute existences, which were types of majesty and power, while the latter chiselled forms of men called divinities; and to these they offered their sacrifices.

Under the genial and life-giving rays of liberty, which beamed upon Greece, an unwonted enthusiasm was created, and sculpture assumed a new phase; and as a natural out-growth, fixed forms and symbols were ignored and variety and dissimilarity substituted. The mystic spell was at last broken, and higher conceptions, noble efforts characterized the Grecian mind. Egyptian supremacy decayed and Grecian rule was supreme.

N. P. C.